



System of
Environmental
Economic
Accounting

NCAVES Highlights

Session 2: SEEA EA Expert Forum

7 December 2021

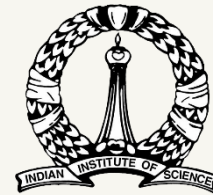
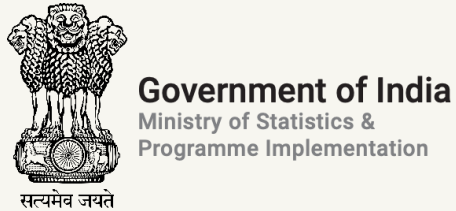


United Nations

NCAVES collaborators



Convention on Biological Diversity



中国科学院



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System of
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Global workstreams

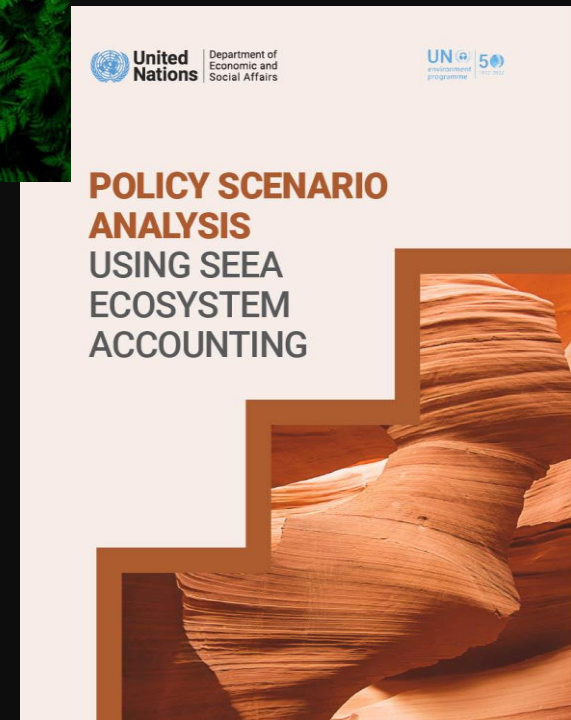
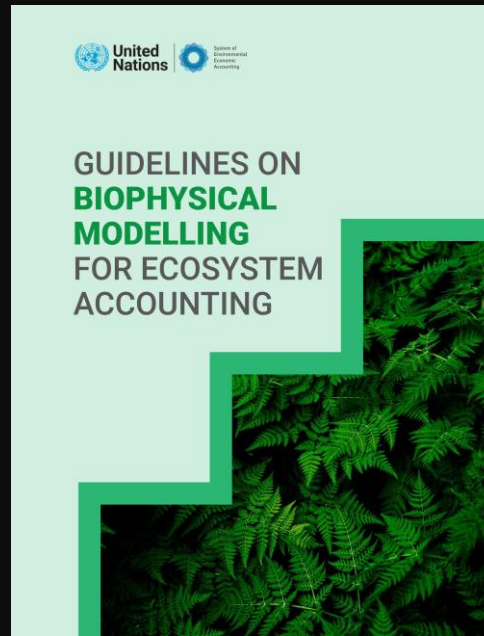


United Nations



Training and capacity building

Guidelines and methodological development



New biodiversity targets cannot afford to fail

Global goals to protect natural systems will be revised this year. China must help to ensure the new targets are measurable and meaningful.

Most measures of biodiversity suggest that things are going badly wrong. Some one million plant and animal species face extinction, according to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). And French President Emmanuel Macron last week called the battle for biodiversity and climate change “the fight of the century”.

A decade ago, countries united to create a 10-year plan, sub-divided into 20 targets, for protecting and conserving natural systems. The plan, also known as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, expires at the end of this year – and most of the targets will not have been reached. Between 24 and 29 February, representatives of the international community will meet in Rome to discuss a new plan. A lot is at stake, and it's vital that the world unites behind the effort.

The meeting will consider a draft of an updated set of global goals, which must be agreed by the summer. Then, in October, world leaders will gather in Kunming, China, for the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. China will be in the chair, the first time it will lead on a conference of the parties to one of the ‘big two’ global environmental conventions (see News page 345).

These discussions are as important to biodiversity as the Paris agreement was to climate, and are likely to be similarly fraught. Conservation groups back more stringent and more measurable targets. European countries sit somewhere between the United States – which has long refused to sign the biodiversity convention – and developing countries, which will be looking to China to fight their corner. But China's efforts to build consensus have been set back by the coronavirus, which has seen parts of the country closed down.

To be fair, not every biodiversity policy has failed. Among the hard-won achievements is the 2014 Nagoya Protocol, an agreement stating that the benefits of genetic resources must be shared equitably among all of those – including Indigenous communities – who have contributed to their development. This can take time, and the World Health Organization has been discussing how to reduce potential delays when genetic information needs to be shared in public-health emergencies. But the protocol's existence is a win for multilateral science and environmental diplomacy.

By contrast, there's been no clear progress on the

“Biodiversity is rarely allowed to stop or delay a new airport runway or power plant.”

headline ambition to slow and eventually reverse the loss of biological diversity around the world.

The Aichi targets failed, in part, because their format makes progress hard to measure. Ahead of this year's talks, a group of researchers led by Elizabeth Green at the Centre for Conservation Science in Sandy, UK, scanned the literature for mentions of the Aichi targets since 2010. The team then invited an expert group to score the targets on a scale of one to ten. All of the targets scored highly for being comprehensive, but most scored relatively poorly on being measurable and realistic (E. J. Green *et al.* *Conserv. Biol.* 33, 1360–1369; 2019).

Take the first target. Intended to ensure that “people are aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably”, it's clear this aims to raise public awareness of and engagement with biodiversity, but it's not clear when success has been achieved.

Those drawing up a new generation of biodiversity goals and targets understand this. The text of a new draft released last month contains spaces in square brackets, ready to be filled in when more-quantitative measures are agreed. Such measures include ensuring strict protection for important ecosystems and finding nature-based solutions that increase resilience to natural disasters (see Comment page 360).

Ambition versus achievement

The Aichi targets didn't fail solely because they weren't measurable. They also failed because countries did not need to report what they were doing to achieve them.

The biodiversity convention's member states have to publish biodiversity action plans – but these are often statements of a country's ambitions, rather than records of its achievements. For the next set of goals this has to change, and fortunately there seems to be a way forward. This is the UN System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA), a mechanism for reporting environmental data, and it needs to become the global standard for environmental reporting.

SEEA was adopted in 2012 to encourage countries' national statistical offices to take responsibility for collecting and reporting environmental data. Asking statistics offices to do this was a stroke of genius. These offices are already responsible for reporting national economic data to the UN. They work to the best available standards and strict deadlines – and they get the job done. Charging them with reporting environmental data ensured that these data would be treated in the same way.

What began as a trickle of countries following the system has surged to more than 80 states sending updates to the UN on a multitude of environmental indicators, from the state of their forests to the state of their fisheries. Developing countries will need to be supported to get up to speed and contribute their own ideas. But the die is cast.

As is sometimes the case with the UN, a lack of joined-up thinking allowed SEEA to emerge independently of other indicators, such as the Aichi targets and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Now, moves are under way towards some harmonization. Last July, the UN published a global indicator review (go.nature.com/2ssa2bc) in which



“Last July, the UN published a global indicator review .. in which researchers confirmed that countries could use SEEA to report 34 of the 147 Aichi target indicators and 21 of the 230 SDG target indicators.

This is an important start, but also indicates how much needs to be done before more goals and targets can be reported using the SEEA framework — an opportunity which researchers must not pass up.”

Business accounting

Business and Natural Capital Accounting Case Study: Ambuja Cement - India

Report of the NCAVES Project

Johan Lammerant



This landscape is not exhaustive. The Capitals Coalition will continue to explore the landscape as it evolves.

Communication



NCAVES INDIA FORUM 2021



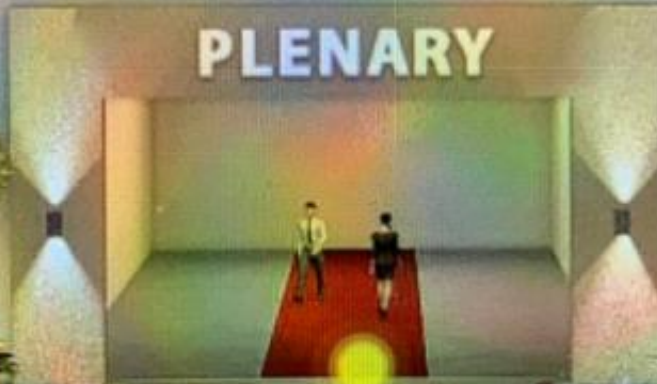
Government of India
Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation



POSTER PRESENTATION



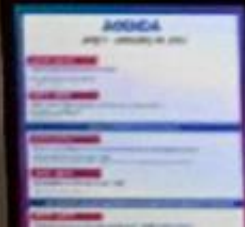
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EXHIBITION ARENA



AGENDA



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